DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 119 239 CS 202 571

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TITLE Daily Newspaper Circulation and the Young Reader.
PUB DATE Aug 75
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (Ottowa, Canada, August 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Journalism; *Media Research; *News Media; *Newspapers; Occupational Mobility; *Reading Habits; Socioeconomic Influences; *Television Viewing; Young Adults

ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine the factors involved in young persons' subscribing or nonsubscribing to one of the two local daily morning newspapers in a metropolitan area. The sampling included 192 young persons living in apartment complexes, of whom 109 subscribed to at least one of the two newspapers. The results of the analysis of the factors involved were broken into such categories as readership, education, marital status, occupation, lifestyle, mobility, and media comparisons. From the results it was concluded that more subscribers than nonsubscribers tended to be clustered in the higher socioeconomic group. Occupation together with income and education discriminated better than any of the demographic variables taken separately. Subscribers watched television news more often than nonsubscribers. Both groups tended to believe that newspapers give the "clearest understanding" of state and local politics. It was later discovered that some of the "nonsubscribers" were actually subscribers to an afternoon newspaper. The data also suggested that although more than half the sample were newspaper subscribers, they were not traditional subscribers and more research needs to be done on this topic. (TS)

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DAILY NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION AND THE YOUNG READER

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Nearly fifteen years ago Bruce Westley and Werner Severin found, in a carefully-conducted statewide survey in Wisconsin, that those who did not report themselves as regular daily newspaper readers were, as a group, "low" in income and educational achievement.[1] They were also more often relatively young or old and living in rural areas. In 1971-2, Penrose, et al. found, in a partial replication of the Westley and Severin study conducted in North Carolina, that the daily newspaper non-reader is the same type of person as Westley and Severin found a decade earlier.[2] The North Carolina study also found that "significantly larger numbers of people--especially the Blacks, the poorer and less educated--have decided not to read the newspaper."[3]

In a nationwide study of daily newspaper readership conducted by the American Newspaper Publishers Association, it was found that the strength of the daily newspaper's circulation lies in the middle range of the population.[4] That is, daily newspaper readership is strongest among those in the middle income, middle age, and middle education range. Newspapers apparently do not appeal to those in either extreme of the population.

The available data on newspaper reading and subscribing suggests that as persons "get more education, move into white collar jobs, earn more money, reach the twenty-five-to-fifty-four age bracket, and settle down in urban areas, they develop a greater appetite for news."[5]

Certainly, a very real concern for newspaper editors and managers

is whether the young people of the community will become and remain newspaper readers as they reach the "twenty-five-to-fifty-four age bracket" or will the newspaper simply become a journal edited by old persons for old persons? "It is tempting to blame outside forces for the drop in circulations, but probably more honest to look for the trouble in the newspapers themselves. The psychology of the 55-year-old male executive still shapes the editorial product when half of the population is under 30, and just plain not interested in what he has to offer."[6]

The data for this study were gathered as part of a larger study designed to determine the underlying factors involved in nonreadership.[7] This study is an analysis of a subsample of the larger sample. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the young persons of a metropolitan area to determine the factors involved in subscribing or nonsubscribing to one or the other of the two local daily newspapers.

Method

The 1959 Census survey of subscribing households reported that urban owner-occupied households were more than one and one-half times as likely to be subscribers than renter occupied housing units.[8] The newspapers under study here had nearly one and one-half times as much penetration in single family homes as in apartments, but the larger study found that a substantial number of apartment dwellers in the 18 to 24 age range were subscribing to one or another of the two daily newspapers.[9] For this reason, it was thought that an analysis of this subsample of young persons would prove helpful in determining the factors involved in subscribing or nonsubscribing to a daily newspaper.

In the original study a systematic random sample of households in

the metropolitan area was taken for the survey. The sample used in the current study consists of all persons between 18-24 living in apartment complexes. Persons 18-24 living in single family housing units were not included in the analysis because of insufficient numbers (N=36). The number of young persons living in apartment complexes totaled 192. The sampling error for a sample of this size was calculated to be approximately 7 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level. Of the 192 young persons living in apartment complexes, 109 or nearly 57 per cent subscribed to one or the other of the two local daily newspapers.

Based on the results of previous research in the area of newspaper subscribing, it was hypothesized that the subscribers would differ from the nonsubscribers along traditional demographic variables.[10]

It was further hypothesized that the two groups would have different lifestyles. Generally, it was hypothesized that subscribers would be more closely identified with the geographic area than nonsubscribers; that they would be more geographically stable; they would be longer term residents of the area and would be more content with living in the area than nonsubsribers. It was also hypothesized that nonsubscribers would have less accurate information about locally elected government officials than subscribers. Finally, it was hypothesized that the two groups would differ with respect to media behavior. Specifically, it was thought that the nonsubscribers would spend less time with the news than subscribers and would rely more on television for sources of information and entertainment.

The latter hypotheses are based partly on the statement by Bagdikian that, "In general, the rate of newspaper reading is high for teenage children, drops from age eighteen to about twenty-four as they are

away at college or in military service, or newly married with both partners working and out of the house, then rises sharply as the first baby is born, and remains fairly consistent until retirement age, when reading goes up again." They were also based on the findings of the larger study previously mentioned.

Results

The results of the analysis show that subscribers read the paper more often and read more of it than nonsubscribers. However, it was discovered that the differences between subscribers and nonsubscribers were accounted for largely by the subscribers to the afternoon paper. For this reason, it was decided to analyze the responses of the subscribers to the two papers separately. Following are the detailed results of the analysis.

Readership. Both groups of subscribers spend more time reading their newspapers than nonsubscribers, but the subsribers to the afternoon paper read the paper more thoroughly than the subscribers to the morning paper. While subscribers report reading more of each category of news (local, world and national, sports, women's and business) than nonsubscribers, the differences between the subscribers to the morning paper and nonsubscribers are not statistically significant. The differences are significant for the afternoon paper subscribers. These data seem to suggest that persons have more time to read a paper in the afternoon and should, therefore, spend more time reading the paper than morning subscribers. These data are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 About Here

The second category of hypotheses concerned demographic variables. The results of these analyses follow.

Education. Subscribers and nonsubscribers cannot reliably be differentiated from each other on the basis of amount of education. But significantly more of the subscribers to the afternoon paper have a high school or better education than subscribers to the morning paper.

Marital Status. Subscribers and nonsubscribers cannot be distinguished by marital status, but marital status does differ between morning and afternoon subscribers at a statistically significant level. Interestingly, the majority of the respondents in this age group were married. However, it should be pointed out that despite multiple call-backs on "not-at-homes," surveys yield fewer singles because of their different life styles, than marrieds. Probably, the ratio of singles to marrieds in the universe is higher than is reflected in these data.

Occupation. Subscribers are significantly more likely to be in professional-technical occupations than nonsubscribers. There were more professional-technical occupations represented by morning subscribers than afternoon subscribers, but the difference was not significant.

The statistical summary of these analyses are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 About Here

Lifestyle. A series of questions designed to elicit lifestyle information failed to yield significant differences between subscribers and nonsubscribers. Respondents were asked how they spent their leisure time; how often they went out for entertainment, to eat supper, to visit friends, to visit relatives and to visit in neighbor's homes. Subscribers and nonsubscribers did not differ from each other on any of these questions.

Although not statistically significant, the following questions did show a consistent pattern.

The more frequent out-of-town shoppers, although few in number, tended to be nonsubscribers.

Subscribers tended to take somewhat more frequent weekend trips than nonsubscribers.

While neither subscribers nor nonsubscribers participated much in clubs, nonsubscribers tended to be even less active than subscribers.

Although the two groups were nearly evely split with respect to local friends, neighbor contacts and visiting, the nonsubscribers tended to be somewhat more active than subscribers.

The pattern which is suggested by these data is that the subscribers tend to be somewhat more involved in the home and home-related activity than nonsubscribers. With the exception of weekend trips, subscribers are involved a little more in local shopping, local clubs and staying home than nonsubscribers.

Mobility. The majority of the subscribers and nonsubscribers alike had not lived at their present address for more than one year. But the afternoon subscribers were much more likely to be new than the morning subscribers.

Subscribers were somewhat longer term residents of the area than nonsubscribers, but not significantly so. And the morning paper subscribers tended to be longer term residents than the afternoon subscribers. There was virtually no difference between subscribers and nonsubscribers when asked how much longer they anticipated living in the area. Significantly more of the morning paper subscribers than afternoon subscribers, however, reported that they planned to live in

the area for three or more years longer.

These data are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 About Here

It was hypothesized that nonsubscribers would have less accurate information about locally elected officials than subscribers. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 4.

Table 4 About Here

As can readily be seen from Table 4, neither subscribers nor nonsubscribers can correctly identify locally elected officials. Although subscribers were more likely to be able to correctly identify the persons, they were not significantly more likely to be able to correctly identify them than nonsubscribers.

In the comparison of morning and afternoon subscribers, the morning subscribers were significantly more accurate in their identifications than the afternoon subscribers. The morning subscribers were able to correctly identify one of the city councilmen and the superintendent of schools. The morning paper subscribers were, of course, longer term residents of the area so that alone may explain the difference.

Media Comparisons. A series of questions were asked to determine the media behavior of respondents. Specifically, a comparison of television viewing and newspaper readership was sought. Respondents were questioned about their television viewing habits, the total time spent watching television and were asked to compare television and newspapers on a number of questions about relative coverage and information.

The results of the media comparison analysis are reported in Table 5.

Table 5 About Here

Subscribers watch national television news significantly more than nonsubscribers. But morning paper subscribers and evening paper subscribers did not differ from each other on this variable. Morning paper subscribers watch local news on television significantly more often than afternoon subscribers even though there was no difference between subscribers and nonsubscribers generally.

Nonsubscribers spend less, but not significantly less, total time watching television than subscribers. But subscribers to the evening paper spend significantly more time watching television than do subscribers to the morning paper.

When asked which medium (television, newspapers, radio, magazines or other people) brings the latest news, gives the most complete shopping information, provides the clearest understanding of national, state and local issues, there were no significant differences between subscribers and nonsubscribers. Nor could subscribers to the morning paper be differentiated from the subscribers to the afternoon paper.

When asked where they got most of their information, subscribers were more likely to respond newspapers than nonsubscribers. Although the difference between subscribers and nonsubscribers was not significant, the results are consistent with the second question in the series which was, "Where do you get the next most information?" In answer to this

question, subscribers significantly differed from nonsubscribers in their reply. Thus, it would seem that although newspapers are not the primary source of information, they outrank other media as secondary sources, at least for subscribers. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, nonsubscribers report using other media more than newspapers as a secondary source of information. Among subscribers, the afternoon subscribers rely significantly more on the paper as a source of information than morning paper subscribers.

Summary and Conclusions

Generally, neither demographic variables nor psychological variables significantly discriminated between subscribers and nonsubscribers. However, more subscribers than nonsubscribers tended to be clustered in the higher socioeconomic status group. Occupation, which did discriminate at a statistically significant level, in harness with income and education, discriminated better than any of the demographic variables taken separately.

Contrary to popular opinion, subscribers watched television news more often than nonsubscribers. And subscribers significantly more often than nonsubscribers looked in the newspaper for more information about something they had seen on television than did nonsubscribers. Furthermore, the afternoon subscribers were significantly more likely to look in the paper for more information about something seen on television than were morning paper subscribers. These data coupled with the fact that respondents reported using the paper as a secondary source of information strongly suggest that the two media complement each other as information sources. In fact, it may be that the newspaper is actually the primary source of information, but is perceived by the respondent

as being the second source because he spends more total time with television.

Third, both subscribers and nonsubscribers tended to believe that newspapers give the "clearest understanding" of state and local politics.

Nevertheless, neither subscribers nor nonsubscribers in this age range are very interested in local politics or politicians as evidenced by the fact that neither group was able to identify locally elected officials when asked.

Both subscribers and nonsubscribers in this age range are very active. In each group, more than half the sample goes out for entertainment once or twice a week and participates in some form of sports activity once or twice a week or more often. Nonsubscribers were even more active in this regard than subscribers suggesting that the major competition for newspapers is reading time. That is, time which might be spent reading is spent doing other things away from the home.

These data suggest that although more than half the sample (56.8 per cent) were newspaper subscribers, they are not traditional subscribers. They spend little time reading the newspaper; they do not care much about political affairs; they use the newspaper as a supplement to television; and they are not, generally, tuned in to the local community. They are well educated, well employed and very mobile. They seem to use the newspaper as a valuable source of information on their own terms; they do not read it thoroughly, but rather seek out the information they want and need.

Much more research is needed to determine what the young people are reading in newspapers and what they are not reading. In any market, the product must serve some perceived need to survive. More information is

needed about the perceived information needs of the young people. As Derek Daniels, Vice President for news of the Knight-Ridder group of newspapers recently said, "we must change our definitions of editorial content--news, if you will--to provide ever-larger amounts of information that is immediately useful to the reader. And by useful, I mean information that can in fact be put to use--and quickly--by the reader."[11]

TABLE 1

Significance of differences between subscribers and nonscribers on amount of news read by each of several categories, by newspaper read

	Newspaper					
	Morning			Afternoon		
Amount Read	x^2	df	p	x^2	df	p
Local News	8.39	4	ns	37.26	4	$<.001$
World and National	6.67	4	ns	36.54	4	$<.001$
Sports News	1.25	4	ns	34.26	4	$<.001$
Women's News	11.80	4	$<.05$	38.87	4	$<.001$
Business News	0.67	4	ns	33.85	4	$<.001$

TABLE 2

Comparison of non-subscribers and subscribers and subscribers to A.M. and P.M. on demographic variables

	Nonsubscribers (N=83)	Subscribers (N=109)	A.M. (N=32)	P.M. (N=77)
Education				
High School or Less	53.0	46.8	12.5	1.3
More than H.S.	47.0	53.2	87.5	98.7
	$x^2=.077$, df=1, p=ns		$x^2=9.76$, df=1, $p<.01$	
Marital Status				
Married	60.2	75.2	65.6	79.2
Not Married	39.8	24.8	34.4	20.8
	$x^2=.527$, df=1, p=ns		$x^2=4.674$, df=1, $p<.05$	
Occupation				
Prof-Tech.	9.6	19.3	21.9	18.2
Not Prof-Tech.	90.4	80.7	78.1	81.8
	$x^2=4.246$, df=1, $p<.05$		$x^2=.427$, df=1, p=ns	

TABLE 3

MOBILITY

Comparison of subscribers and nonscribers and morning and afternoon subscribers on geographical mobility

		Non-subscribers	Subscribers	Morning	Afternoon
How Long at Present Address	Less Than 3 Yrs.	98.8	96.3	90.6	98.7
	More Than 3 Yrs.	1.2	3.7	9.4	1.3
		x^2=1.307, df=1, p=ns		x^2=0.06, df=1, p=ns	
How Long Lived in Area	Less Than 3 Yrs.	66.3	57.8	50.0	61.0
	More Than 3 Yrs.	33.7	42.2	50.0	39.0
		x^2=1.534, df=1, p=ns		x^2=2.449, df=1, p=ns	
How Long Anticipate Living in Area	Less Than 3 Yrs.	48.2	50.5	40.6	54.5
	More Than 3 Yrs.	51.8	49.5	59.4	45.5
		x^2=1.249, df=1, p=ns		x^2=3.873, df=1, p<.05	

TABLE 4

Comparison of subscribers and nonsubscribers and morning and afternoon subscribers on correct identification of elected officials

		Non-subscribers	Subscribers	Morning	Afternoon
U.S. Congressman	Correct	20.5	24.8	43.8	16.9
	Incorrect	79.5	75.2	56.2	83.1
		x^2=0.4716, p=ns		x^2=0.171, p=ns	
City Councilman	Correct	6.0	11.0	18.8	7.8
	Incorrect	94.0	89.0	81.2	92.2
		x^2=1.607, p=ns		x^2=5.246, p<.05	
School Board Member	Correct	9.6	5.5	9.4	3.9
	Incorrect	90.4	94.5	90.6	96.1
		x^2=1.204, p=ns		x^2=2.436, p=ns	
School Superintendent	Correct	19.3	19.3	37.5	11.7
	Incorrect	80.7	80.7	62.5	88.3
		x^2=0.000, p=ns		x^2=17.947, p<.001	

TABLE 5

Comparison of subscribers and nonsubscribers and morning and afternoon subscribers on media behavior variables

		Non-subscribers	Subscribers	Morning	Afternoon
How Often Watches Nat'l TV News	Usually	63.8	77.1	71.9	79.2
	Less Often	36.2	22.9	28.1	20.8
		x^2=4.248, p<.05		x^2=1.442, p=ns	
How Often Watches Local TV News	Usually	67.5	76.1	87.5	76.6
	Less Often	32.5	23.1	12.5	23.4
		x^2=1.826, p=ns		x^2=4.033, p<.05	
Total Time Spent Watching TV	- 5 Hours	88.0	84.4	93.5	80.5
	+ 5 Hours	12.0	15.6	6.5	19.5
		x^2=0.544, p=ns		x^2=7.47, p<.01	
Where Gets Most Information	TV	54.2	42.2	40.6	42.9
	Newspaper	22.9	45.0	40.6	46.8
	Other	22.9	12.8	18.8	10.3
		x^2=2.856, p=ns		x^2=2.982, p=ns	
Where Gets Second Most Information	TV	27.7	42.2	34.4	45.5
	Newspaper	34.9	42.2	40.6	42.9
	Other	37.4	15.6	25.0	11.7
		x^2=17.147, p<.001		x^2=6.508, p<.05	

FOOTNOTES

[1]Bruce Westley and Werner J. Severin, "A Profile of the Daily Newspaper Non-reader," Journalism Quarterly, 41:45-50 (1964).

[2]Jeanne Penrose, David H. Weaver, Richard Cole and Donald Lewis Shaw, "The Newspaper Nonreader 10 Years Later: A Partial Replication of Westley-Severin," Journalism Quarterly, 51:631-38 (1974).

[3]Ibid., p. 631.

[4]"News and Editorial Content and Readership of the Daily Newspaper," News Research Bulletin, No. 5 (April 26, 1973) ANPA.

[5]Ben H. Bagdikian, The Information Machines, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p. 53.

[6]Brian Boyer,"Circulation Disaster Among Chicago Newspapers," in John D. Stevens and William E. Porter, The Rest of the Elephant, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973, p. 67.

[7]John C. Schweitzer, The Daily Newspaper and Its Community: A Study of Readership, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1974.

[8]"Household Delivery of Daily and Sunday Newspapers," Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics (June 3, 1960), Series P-20, No. 102.

[9]Schweitzer, op.cit.

[10]See, for example, Westley and Severin, Penrose and ANPA Research Bulletin No. 5, op.cit.

[11]Derek Daniels, Speech before the American Society of Journalism School Administrators, San Diego State University, August 19, 1974.